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## **Blighted Property Review Committee**

### **Regular Meeting Wednesday, January 23, 2008**

The regular meeting of the Blighted Property Review Committee was held on the above date for the transaction of general business.

#### **ATTENDANCE**

W. Bealer  
S. Fuhs  
L. Olsen, Chair  
D. Johnson  
M. Candelario  
M. Wolfe

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

T. Naugle  
H. Lessig  
T. Brogan  
M. Mayfield  
L. Churchill  
C. Kanezo  
S. Franco  
J. Khokhar  
L. Kelleher  
A. Miller  
T. McMahon  
R. Wentzel

#### **ABSENT**

None

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Olsen called the meeting to order at 6:05p.m.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES**

The minutes and agendas were approved unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Michael Lauter, of the Centre Park Historic District, requested the committee consider the Artifacts Bank as the blighted property certification process unfolds. Mr. Lauter described the efforts of the Artifacts Bank and the utility of having a central repository for valuable materials located in the City.

## **GREAT VALLEY ASSOCIATES REPORT**

Mr. Terry Naugle, of Great Valley Associates, thanked the members of the Blighted Property Review Committee for committing themselves to a process that will benefit the citizens of Reading.

Mr. Naugle reported the survey was begun in November of 2007, with the intention of visually documenting blighted properties. The qualifications for blight, and inclusion with the survey, were taken directly from the Blighted Property Review Committee Ordinance; in most cases the review of identified properties was conducted from the public right of way. Mr. Naugle noted the survey took into consideration the overall outward physical appearance of a property, visually apparent structural deficiencies and the condition of the property lot.

The survey identified:

- A total of 1,462 blighted properties;
- 254 vacant lots;
- No area of the City was without blighted properties, though areas existed that contained significantly fewer numbers. The four corners of the City

- represented geographic areas where the numbers of blighted properties were substantially less.
- Substantial numbers of blighted properties were identified in neighborhoods surrounding the central business district.
  - Numerous clusters of mixed use (Residential/Commercial) were identified.
  - When compared with the 2004 FELs study, a minimum to significant increase in vacant properties was observed; the significance of the increase correlated with the geographic distribution of blighted properties.
  - 682 properties ( 70% of total number) were identified as not owner occupied and likely sources of rental housing.

Mr. Johnson inquired if the study was assuming that non owner occupied properties were rental properties. Mr. Naugle indicated the survey did not make the assumption; however, the survey could support that conclusion. Mr. Johnson also noted that the number of blighted commercial properties increased from 2004 to present.

Mr. Franco remarked that the data, compiled by Great Valley Associates, could be easily manipulated and formatted for easier review, as well as expanded as other data became available.

Mr. Olsen, noting the necessity of further review, requested each member of the committee receive print and electronic copies of the survey. Mr. Kanezo stated that print forms would be available by the end of the meeting and electronic copies would be distributed as soon as possible.

The members of the committee thanked Mr. Naugle for his report.

## **HOUSING ADVOCATES FOR READING**

Mr. Henry Lessig, representative of Housing Advocates for Reading (HAR), stated that the report drafted by HAR was an attempt at developing a consistent approach for improving the quality of City housing. The approach recommend by HAR focused on stabilizing neighborhoods through targeting specific properties and providing resources to improve the targets. This approach would build on existing neighborhood strengths and make the best use of available resources. Mr. Lessig referred to maps produced, which depicted the locations of blighted properties documented as part of the FELs report. Mr. Lessig agreed

that the concentration of blighted properties agreed with the report provided by Mr. Naugle.

Mr. Olsen thanked Mr. Lessig for the report; he inquired as to what the committee should take away from the recommendations.

Mr. Lessig suggested the committee should be willing to use the experience and knowledge of HAR. Mr. Lessig emphasized that HAR was willing to assist the Blighted Property Review Committee, through research and issue analysis.

Mr. Bealer stated he received a copy the report earlier in the week and had an opportunity to review the recommendations. Mr. Bealer expressed the opinion that the Blighted Property Review Committee should consider the recommendations when developing an overall strategy.

Mr. Candelario agreed with the comments made by Mr. Bealer and thanked Mr. Lessig for his report.

Mr. Johnson questioned if the recommendations contained in the HAR report could be blended with the Great Valley report. Mayor McMahon noted that the HAR report was based heavily on the FELs report and could be used for data comparison.

Mr. Miller noted additional surveys have been compiled by other sources. One survey, compiled by Lt. Ronald Wentzel of the Reading Fire Department, noted properties that were not only blighted, but presented a clear danger to the safety of the community.

Lt. Wentzel explained that there would likely be some data overlap between his survey and the survey prepared by Great Valley Associates. The properties identified were in the worst possible structural condition and would require immediate demolition.

Mayor McMahon suggested the committee consider a compromise approach: invest a portion of resources towards addressing properties in need of immediate demolition and allocate the remaining resources to implement whatever overall policy is agreed to.

Mr. Churchill reminded the committee members that they are charged with implementing the specific criteria of their ordinance; he strongly encouraged the

committee, along with all other relevant organizations and agencies, to reach a policy consensus before implementation occurs. Mr. Churchill explained that it would be important to the process for cooperation; public disagreement would only lead to delay and frustration.

Mr. Olsen agreed that consensus would need to be achieved; he suggested the next meeting of the Blighted Property Review Committee be dedicated to a vigorous internal discussion as to what the committee thought that policy should be.

## **STAFF REPORT**

Mr. Kanezo reported that he and the City Clerk, with the assistance of John Kramer and the Center Community Leadership, have been coordinating a meeting of regional Blighted Property Review Committees. The meeting would present an opportunity for information sharing and committee education. Mr. Kanezo inquired if a desire still existed among the committee members to attend such a meeting.

Mr. Olsen, speaking on behalf of the committee, thought such a meeting would be of great benefit and directed Mr. Kanezo to continue his efforts.

Mr. Kanezo requested the committee members submit their availability for March.

Mr. Olsen opened the floor for additional comment, seeing that there was no further discussion he entertained a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bealer moved, seconded by Mr. Johnson to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:35p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Christopher G. Kanezo, Deputy City Clerk*